

Answers
to
Frequently **A**sked **Q**uestions
on
Parenting
[PART 1]

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

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according to the subject matter to make it easier for readers to find what they are looking for.

We would like to emphasize that our methodology in answering these questions, as has always been the case with our books, will be from an Islamic perspective drawing heavily on verses of the *Qur'an*, teachings of the prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events in his *Seerah*. We will also, *insha'a Allah*, draw on our wealth of practical experience, gained from countless parenting counseling sessions over the years, and our knowledge of child psychology.

This first part is divided into seven main categories covering questions related to correcting behavior, environment, Islamic identity, schooling, celebrations, sex education, and miscellaneous questions. We tried our best to respect this categorization; however, with subjects like these, there was some overlap.

We realize that this is a huge responsibility and we sincerely pray to Allah *SWT* to help us provide the right answers to these questions as well as to make this series beneficial to as many Muslim families as possible, as they seek to be the best Muslim parents for their children. We also ask Him to protect our Muslim families, our Muslim youth, our Muslim children and the entire Muslim *Ummah*.

Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir

Contents

CORRECTING BEHAVIOR

1. Traditional methods of parenting	12
2. Conflict resolution among young children	14
3. Getting over shyness	16
4. Being more social and getting over shyness	18
5. Playing with other children in the park	20
6. Changing undesired qualities of children	22
7. Sources to help in changing children's behavior properly	25
8. When you ignore a child's negative behavior	27
9. How to measure success in training children	28
10. The best way to raise our children in the West	30
11. Helping a difficult child do homework	32
12. Reference material for raising children	34
13. Punishment for a misbehaving toddler	36
14. Is it bad to give children too much attention?	37
15. Dealing with a jealous child	39
16. Is physical punishment allowed?	40

ENVIRONMENT

17. Responsibility of uncles and aunts towards nephews and nieces with a non-Muslim mother	47
18. Children affected by a non-Muslim teacher at school	50
19. Visiting non-Muslim friends when no Muslims live nearby	54
20. Countering the messages of media and society	56
21. Resources for children's material	58
22. Children living in their parents' home after marriage	59
23. Children participating in activities of mainstream society	60

24. Identifying bad habits in a toddler exposed to other children ..	62
25. Dealing with racism and prejudice	64
26. Balancing Islamic teachings and interaction with North American society	66
27. Our children comparing themselves with other non-practicing Muslim children their age	67

SCHOOLING

28. Dealing with dating in high school	71
29. Placing children in a preschool program	73
30. How can I get my daughter to dress Islamically in middle school or high school?	74
31. A teacher whose son is in her class	77
32. How to follow up on homework with children	79
33. Is it safe to send your children to public school in junior high?.	80
34. What do you mean by "safer schools"?	81
35. Problems in the Western school system	82
36. Should I send my daughter to school if I am staying in North America for only one year and how would that affect her?	83

ISLAMIC IDENTITY

37. Watching cartoons on TV and producing software for Muslim children	87
38. Will praising children spoil them?.....	91
39. Telling children about Allah	93
40. Providing an active lifestyle for your children	95

SEX EDUCATION

41. Sex education for children under six	99
42. Embarrassing questions from a six year old	103
43. Should I talk to my nine-year-old daughter about sex?	107
44. Approaching the matter of sex and puberty with my 12-year-old daughter	109
45. An oversensitive 14-year-old girl	114
46. How can I convince my husband that he has no talk to our 12-year-old son about sex?	116
47. What a single mother can do to teach her 13-year-old son about sex.	116
48. Advice for a parent who realized that his grade five son already knows a lot about sex.....	116
49. Should we discuss sex with our children?	117
50. Sex education in public schools	125
51. Dating among teenagers	126
52. Crushes and acting upon feelings among teens	128
53. Educating children about sex in an Islamic manner	132

CELEBRATIONS

54. Preparing our children for <i>Ramadan</i>	137
55. Can we participate in the celebration of Halloween, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and so on?	139
56. Helping a young child not to feel bad because other young Muslim children are participating in Western celebrations and she is not	142
57. Going to prom, for a 16-year-old Muslim girl	144
58. Celebrating birthdays	146

MISCELLANEOUS

- 59. Reasons for being hyperactive 153
- 60. Building good habits for reading books 155
- 61. Relationship between food and child's behavior 157
- 62. Marriage proposals in university 158

REFERENCES 160

Correcting Behavior

Q. 1

My husband always uses the traditional methods and ways—with all their positive and negative aspects—in dealing with our children. He always

says: "My opinion is right and this is the proper way to deal with the children. Our parents used to do it this way and it worked on us." I feel that this is not right. Can you please advise me what to do?

Answer

Thank you very much, Sister, for your question. To answer this, a few points must be considered.

They are:

- We have to agree first that, as Muslims, our main points of reference are the Qur'an and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad SAW. We should always refer any question to these original sources. No matter who used any principles before us, we have to check these principles against these main references.
- The Qur'an condemns blind imitation and suggests that believers should always find and use the proper guidelines to regulate their lives rather than follow their forefathers blindly.¹
- Traditions are not necessarily always Islamic. Some traditions may have their origins in Islamic values while others may not, and yet others could be neutral. If the traditional methods your husband is using are based on Islamic principles, you should support him and try to use them yourself. If the traditional methods you are referring to have no basis in Islam, or go against the Islamic spirit and guidelines, it is your duty to kindly talk about this issue with your husband and remind him in a gentle manner that we should not follow these un-Islamic traditions.

¹ (Q43, V22-24)

• The statement that "*Our parents used to do it this way and it worked on us*" should not justify using these methods if they are not suitable for our times and environment. Ali Ibn Abi Taleb RAA is reported to have said: "Raise your children using ways different from the ways used with you, because they were created for times other than your times."² Imagine, this advice was given 14 centuries ago, when life was very slow. What about our time and age? Considering that things are changing so quickly and that the environment in North America is very different from the environment in countries where Muslims live as a majority, we need this wisdom even more, here and now.

² Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb encyclopedia by Muhammad Jawwad Mughneiah, Arabic, Dar Al-Tayyar Al-Jadeed for printing and Publications, Bayroot, Lebanon, 2004)

Q.2

Can you please advise us of the most suitable way to resolve conflicts among our children? For example, my 5-year-

old daughter and seven-year-old son are always fighting about who has the right to play with a certain toy. What should I do with them?

Answer

Conflicts are part of life and they do happen, particularly among children (siblings), especially when they are close in age. Suitable solutions to such conflicts greatly depend on the reason for the conflict. Most of the time, in the case of young children, the conflict and fight is related to either a toy or a book that each of them want. Here are some guidelines to avoid this type of conflict:

- Set very clear rules of ownership. If the toy belongs to one child, he or she has the right to allow or not allow the other child to use it; Islam recognizes individual ownership and, at the same time, encourages sharing. Be careful, however. Do not deny anybody a right that is given to him or her by Allah *SWT*, even in the name of creating more sharing Muslims. This may cause sibling rivalry and resentment.
- If the toy is common, that is, it does not belong to a specific child, make sure that equal sharing is the rule. Set a specific time for each child to use the toy, for example, two to five minutes per turn, depending on the nature of the toy.
- Do not rush to solve the problem for your children. Allow them to resolve the situation themselves.
- Deal with your children equally. Do not favour one child over the other because of age, particularly if they are still young and close in age.

• Be fair in all your actions with them.

• Provide them with games and toys that can only be played by more than one person. This will teach them to cooperate and will improve their social skills by making them deal with each other.

• Tell them stories about the importance of cooperating and how important it is for siblings to bond. Make sure that the language you use is suitable for their age.

We would like to point out here that it is very important to train our children on proper Islamic conflict resolution from a young age. This will help them avoid future sibling rivalries, enmity and jealousy. At a young age, they may fight about toys and books, but if they do not learn proper conflict-resolution methodology and techniques early enough in their lives, their inability to resolve conflicts may stay with them when they grow older, and they may start fighting about more serious matters such as inheritance.

Family is the cornerstone of Muslim society. We should keep it very strong and intact by maintaining harmony among family members and by raising our children with the right Islamic guidance in every sphere of life to ensure the continuity of a strong family unit *insha'a Allah*.

Q. 3

I have two sons, six and four years old. I have noticed that my six year old is sociable and outgoing. He likes to meet new children and can make friends with them. As for my four year old, he is more withdrawn, shy, and it takes

him a long time to warm up to other children and play with them. Could this be their nature, or could we have caused this to happen because of how we are treating them? Is there anything we can do to help our younger son be more sociable and get over his shyness?

Answer

We thank the questioner for being observant and noticing these differences between her sons. This is a good quality for parents to have and it helps them recognize their children's traits early and take steps towards modifying their temperament to reach a healthy balanced point.

Every child is born with their own temperament and combination of various traits. A child could be inclined towards being sociable while his own brother could naturally be shy and withdrawn. The environment also has its own influence on a child's character. The child's temperament and surroundings mutually influence each other. A shy baby who cries and screams when someone tries to play with him would cause people around him to stay away and not play with him as much as they would with another baby who smiles at them. Another example is when a father takes his daughter to swimming classes and she fights and screams before getting into the water. That would discourage the father from taking her to such classes very often and would reinforce the withdrawn characteristic of this child.

The role of parents is to provide an environment that might help the child modify his character and be more in the middle of the road. For example,

instead of following your natural instinct to avoid your shy toddler, approach him in a gentle and gradual way, or take him to play groups where he has the opportunity to play with other toddlers in the comfort of his mother's presence. Do not be discouraged by the child's crying and flailing when he is around other children. Continue to attend the play groups in order to expose him to more children. Eventually, with your assurance, he will feel more comfortable and be able to play and share in activities with other children.

Taking a toddler or preschool-aged child to the park would give him a good opportunity to get over his shyness. While he is using the play structure and being around other children, he will develop a level of comfort and confidence in his ability to deal with other children.

Parents may also enroll their children in various classes that teach them skills such as swimming, self defense, and other sports. While the child's focus will be on learning these skills, he will also acquire the social skills necessary to deal with people, cultivate (reinforce) his self-confidence, and he will get over his shyness.

Answers
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Frequently **A**sked **Q**uestions
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[PART 2]

Drs. Ekram & Mohamed Rida Beshir

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questions relating to young children, pre-teens, and teens. It is important to note that all the questions in this series are real and were asked on one occasion or another by attendees of a workshop, an audience member at a conference/convention, or during our live dialogue on various websites such as www.masnet.org and www.islamonline.net.

We would also like to emphasize that our methodology in answering these questions will, as is always the case with our books, be from an Islamic perspective, drawing heavily on verses of Qur'an, teachings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*, and events of his *Seerah*. We will also, insha'a Allah, draw on the practical experience we have *walhamdulillah* gained from countless parenting and counseling sessions during the last few years and our knowledge of child psychology.

We realize that this is a huge responsibility and we sincerely pray to Allah *SWT* to help us provide the right answers to these questions as well as to make this series benefit as many Muslim families as possible in their quest to be the best Muslim parents for their children. We also ask Him to protect our Muslim families, our Muslim youth, our Muslim children and the whole Muslim Ummah.

A note on all Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW*:

Please note that throughout the book, all the Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad *SAAW* mentioned are the English translations of the meaning of the original text in Arabic. Though we have striven to use the most accurate English translations available, we remind the reader that any and all translations are: firstly, not the original words of Allah *SWT* or His prophet *SAAW*, and secondly, can never be as accurate as the original Arabic text.

Drs. Ekram & M. Rida Beshir

Contents

BUILDING CHARACTERS AND DEVELOPING PERSONALITY

1. Building confident and proud Muslims	10
2. Spoiling and pampering our children	13
3. What to do in our children's teenage years if we missed investing in their early years	15
4. Linking children to Allah	18
5. The importance of answering our children's questions	20
6. Learning to control our own anger so that we can teach our children to be patient	23
7. Using opportunities to teach children Important Islamic concepts..	33
8. Proper and improper ways of discipline	35

ENVIRONMENT

9. How to fuse an Eastern culture into the Western culture	40
10. Differences between parenting in the West and parenting in a Muslim-majority country	42
11. Using the Internet	47
12. Signs that our children are experiencing peer pressure and how you can help	49
13. Buying brand name clothing for our children	52
14. Our children participating in mainstream activities	56

YOUNG CHILDREN

15. Training young children to sleep in a separate room -Training young children not to hit others	62
16. Weaning Toddlers	65
17. What to consider when choosing daycare or caregivers for our children	67
18. Teaching young children about Islam and Allah	70
19. Answering young children's questions	72
20. Toilet training	74

21. Going shopping with 3.5 year old	76
22. How we can deliver a message to children despite their short attention span	79
23. Resolving fighting between young children	81
24. Specific Du'as for children	83

PRE-TEENS

25. A 9 year old who tells non-Muslim kids "You are wrong and will go to hellfire"	86
26. The middle child who feels his parents favour his siblings over him	89
27. How to deal with bullying	91
28. A 9 year old who doesn't respect his mother	94
29. A 7 year old girl who wants dolls like Barbie	96

TEENAGERS

30. Teen activism	100
31. A Muslim Teen joining his public school's football team	103
32. A teen who says "I'm an adult" whenever his mother gives him advice	105
33. Teens going to movies with their friends	107

MISCELLANEOUS

34. Controlling anger	112
35. Fathers spending time with children	114
36. Taking our children to Islamic centers	117
37. Helping a child get over the indecent habits she was exposed to by her father	120
38. Not participating in community activities as an excuse to save time to help raise children properly	124
39. Father working in a different city and visiting occasionally	127

Building Characters and Developing Personality

Q. 1

I have three children: a 7 year old boy, a 5 year old girl and a 4 year old boy. I believe in raising them as strong confident Muslims who are comfortable with themselves as Muslims and are

even proud to belong to the Muslim Ummah. I feel this is very important for their identity and I would like it if you could provide me with a few tips on what I should do to fulfill this vision I have for my children.

Answer

This is a very important question and the concern of this sister is genuine and every Muslim parent should have the same concern. Muslims living in North America, Europe, or other places as minorities, should always have a vision for their children to raise them as strong confident personalities who are proud of their identity as Muslims. To fulfill this vision, parents have to work very hard with their children and do following:

- Strengthen their faith and belief in Allah as their creator and Prophet Muhammad SAW as their role model
- Make them feel loved and accepted
- Train them to be capable and highly skilled
- Help them to be critical thinkers

Here are some tips parents can use to achieve the above goals:

To strengthen the Islamic beliefs of our children, we have to help them know Allah SWT and love Him, as well as to know the Prophet SAW and take him as a role model. To do this, we have to link them to their creator SWT. See the answer to question 4 in this section for tips on how to link our children to Allah SWT and keep them connected with Him

at various stages of their lives. Parents also have to live Islam at home, providing a wonderful and warm family atmosphere, be fair in dealing with the children, and participate together in various positive and healthy activities. Another important element in helping strengthen our children's belief in Islam is to help them acquire Islamic habits and concepts¹ and teach/train them to say various Prophetic du'as at different times of the day and on various occasions.

For our children to be confident and feel proud as Muslims, it is very important that they feel loved and accepted for who they are, and not because they are top academic achievers or because they have strong athletic abilities. They have to feel valued by their parents, and every achievement they do should be acknowledged and applauded. Parents should make their children feel special as individuals by trying to find their children's area of strength, recognizing it, and helping their children develop it and excel in it. In their dealings with their children, parents should also avoid being perfectionist, over protective, or humiliating. This will help strengthen children's self esteem.²

We should also strive very hard to make sure that our children are capable and highly skilled. This will help them feel confident and proud of their identity as Muslims because they will not feel that they are less than their peers. Rather, they will feel that they are equal to their peers and can compete in every area with them. Prophet Mohammad SAW advised us to teach our children every useful skill for their age and their environment. Omar Ibn Al-Khattab RAA said; "Teach you children swimming, shooting, and horse back riding." These types of skills were the survival skills needed for their environment. As parents we can't limit the meaning of these teachings to these three skills only. We should teach

¹ See chapter 6 in our book *Muslim Teens, Today's Worry, Tomorrow's Hope* amana Publications, second edition 2004

² See chapter 1 of our book *Meeting the Challenge of Parenting in the West, An Islamic Perspective*. Amana Publications, third edition, 2004

our children every possible skill that is needed for their survival in the Western society. Sports skills relevant to Western society, such as riding a bike at a young age, knowing how to throw a baseball, catch it with a glove, and hit it with a bat etc. are very important for our children's self esteem. The time spent training them in these types of skills is not wasted time. It is a great investment in their well-being and self image. We should also teach our children other skills needed for their survival in this society such as administrative skills, computer skills, communication skills, business skills, and even self defense in some areas of North America.

To help our children be critical thinkers, we should work with them in the following areas:

- Train them in decision making from an early age. For example, for a three year old child, rather than picking an outfit out for him/her and dressing him/her, it is better to put two outfits on the bed and ask him/her to choose one for the outing. For a 5 or 6 year old, rather than deciding on your own what you want him/her to do during the weekend, it is better to ask him/her how they want to spend their weekend. Find out if he/she wants to visit a friend or if he/she wants to go to the park.
- Consult with children from an early age about decisions related to family matters, such as the food they want to eat at supper, the move you are planning to a new house/apartment, etc.
- Guide and explain the consequences of different choices to help them understand the pros and cons of the decisions they make and feel comfortable with it.
- Allow children to occasionally make their own choices in non-critical matters such as the type of snack they will take with them to school, etc.



Is it OK to spoil our children and pamper them?

Answer

The answer to this question will depend on how the questioner defines spoil and pamper. If spoil and pamper means allowing children to do anything they like, without teaching them that there are consequences for their actions and that they have to pay attention to these consequences and think about them before doing these actions, then of course, in this case, it is not OK to spoil or pamper our children.

If spoil and pamper means that when our children make a mistake, we don't point out to them that their action is not accepted, or indicate to them that they have made a mistake, or teach them how to do it properly next time, or help them during the process of training them in the correct and acceptable behaviour, then of course it is not OK to pamper or spoil our children.

If spoil and pamper means that whenever they ask us to buy something for them (a toy, clothing), we rush and buy it for them no matter how many other toys they have, or when we last bought clothes for them, and whether or not they need it, then of course, in this case, it is not OK to spoil or pamper them.

If spoil and pamper means that when they ask us to go on a school trip or to attend the prom or other school parties where opposite sexes are

mixing and mingling freely, of course it is not OK to spoil and pamper them. Or if it means that we allow them to participate in such activities/parties, where sexually stimulating music is being played loudly and almost everyone is drunk and dancing like crazy, of course, it is not OK. As a matter of fact we should never grant them their wishes to attend these kinds of activities because of the unhealthy and dire consequences on their morals and ethical behaviour. Parents should discuss with and explain to their children the logic behind not allowing them to participate in these kinds of gatherings, and should never give in to their children's pleas or any other societal pressure.

In all of the above cases and any other similar situations, it is not OK to spoil and pamper our children. However, if spoiling our children and pampering them means making them feel special and close to us, this is not only allowed, but it is also recommended and encouraged. If spoiling and pampering them means developing a strong bond between us and our children, if it means expressing our love to them very often, then, again, it is not only OK, but it is encouraged and recommended to do so. In fact, it is particularly important in this society, where Muslims are a minority, to build a strong bond and open channels of communication between parents and children. It is just as crucial for Muslims living as a minority in any place in the world. This is because we want our children to be able to take after us and accept our advice and the values and concepts we try to instill in them, particularly in the adolescent stage where teens are strongly drawn to pleasing their peers and are continuously seeking their peers' approval.

Making our children feel special and having this special relationship with them will be of great help in the above area. That is why it is important to spoil and pamper our children in the correct sense.

Q. 3

(a) I attended one of your "Positive Parenting Skills" workshops where you emphasized repeatedly the importance of using the young age of the child to instill Islamic concepts and build healthy habits before they move to stage two. I have two children 14 and 16 years old, and I didn't do this with them when they were young. Does this mean that I missed the boat and I wouldn't be able to help them having a good Islamic personality? Is there anything that I should be doing now to rectify the situation?

(3-b) I attended one of your positive parenting skills workshops. I remember you talking about the two stages that children generally go through as far as approval concerns. My question is: Suppose I didn't start early with my child, and he is now in the second stage, can I do anything to make sure that he will become a good person Islamically?

(3-c) Can you please advise us on the following: For parents who didn't do a good job with their children, who had no chance to see your books and follow your beautiful recommendations, their children are now fashionable, they know little religion and they don't even apply it. They dress Western and act Western. Is it too late for them to try to do something with their children? I still have some hope, but I don't know where and how to start?

Answer

These three questions address the same issue, as such, we will answer them together insha'a Allah. They are very important questions and deserve to be addressed in detail. As such, and for the benefit of all readers, it is necessary to explain and